



Greetings on the Installation of Bishop Paul Smith

Greetings of joy and peace in Jesus' precious and powerful name!

It is my first time to visit your country and it gives me great excitement to be able to come to a place we call the "down under." When I think of Australia, I immediately think of your famous kangaroos. In fact, I told my wife, that I might bring her a kangaroo when I go home—if it's allowed. I don't know if they need vaccination also!

Today is the day that the Lord has made and let us all rejoice and be glad in it! This is a day of rejoicing especially for you—the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand—for the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has given you a new servant-leader, the Bishop Paul Smith.

Incidentally, this is not my first time to meet Bishop Paul. We were together in Neundettelsau, Germany attending the Mekong Leaders Forum way back in 2016. I remember him distinctly because it was a meeting that lasted for more than two weeks and featured a tour of the Luther sites. It was one of those forums I attended which I considered most memorable. I am happy to see him now that he is already the Bishop of a large church body: the LCA NZ.

Today, Bishop Paul Smith takes the helm as the spiritual shepherd of God's flock here in Australia and the Zealand. It is amazing how God's promise of providing for His people and never abandoning them still continues to be fulfilled today. The installation of Bishop Smith is a reminder for all of us—a reminder of God's love in Christ Jesus for His people.

I am blessed and honored to be standing here before you to represent the International Lutheran Council (ILC). As the ILC's Asia Pacific regional representative, I was asked to represent the council at this momentous and significant event. On behalf of the ILC, I would like to congratulate the LCA NZ, a long-standing member of the ILC, for having successfully held your convention and elected a new bishop. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide you, Bishop Paul, as the shepherd of God's flock here in Australia and New Zealand.

My presence here signifies the ILC's wholehearted intention to walk and work with you; to continue to study and learn with you and your pastors the Holy Scriptures—the inspired Word of God—and the Lutheran Confessions as the correct exposition of God's Word. As all of you may be aware of, the ILC is an association of more than 40 confessional Lutheran church bodies worldwide that aims to encourage, strengthen each other and to promote confessional Lutheran theology and practices. These theology and practices are centered in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. I do hope that my being here will show the support and encouragement which the ILC wants to extend to the newly elected Bishop. There is no doubt that with the strong leadership of Bishop Smith, the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand will continue to be on the right path, with God's blessing and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Again, congratulations and God's blessing to you, Bishop Paul Smith. May the Lord of the harvest give you wisdom, strength, and courage as you serve Him and His people.

Before I will end, let me take this opportunity to thank you also for the love and support you've extended to the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, where I am the incumbent President. We are a small church in our country compared to other church bodies. We only have 172 church workers (these are pastors, evangelists, deacons, and deaconesses) and about 36,000 communicant members. It is with great pride that I am able to thank all of you in person for the love and support you gave to our church workers in the Philippines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The love gift you gave was indeed God-sent, and it helped alleviate the financial plight of our church workers. Through your help, God has shown us His loving provisions in times when we needed it. Thank you so much!

To end, let me quote two verses from the Word of God. Psalm 133:1 says: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when God's children dwell in unity."

And in John 17:21, Jesus said: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Again, congratulations Bishop Paul Smith and to your family. God bless us all in Jesus' name! Thank you!

President Antonio Reyes